



# City of Alexandria, VA

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City Hall, 301 King St. Room 3500, Alexandria, VA 22314

## **City of Alexandria Schedules Public Hearing on the Naming of Charles Houston Recreation Center's Gymnasium and Pool**

September 18, 2009

The City of Alexandria invites residents to a public hearing to review and receive comment on a proposal to name the Charles Houston Recreation Center gymnasium and pool in honor of African Americans in Alexandria who, from 1920 to 1965, played a significant role in the struggle for equal educational opportunity. The public hearing is scheduled for 7 p.m. on Wednesday, September 30, at the Charles Houston Recreation Center, 901 Wythe St.

The recently rebuilt and rededicated recreation center is located in the Parker-Gray District, an area rich in history. The center stands on the site of the original Parker-Gray School, constructed in 1920 to replace two older African American elementary schools. The new school was named for John F. Parker and Sarah Gray, principals of the earlier schools. The Charles Houston Recreation Center is named for the famed civil rights lawyer, Charles Hamilton Houston, who spearheaded the effort to improve the quality of education for African Americans in Alexandria, which eventually led to the building of the City's first high school for African Americans, the Parker-Gray High School, in 1950.

Current and former City residents, many of whom attended the Parker-Gray schools, formed an Ad Hoc Naming Committee, whose purpose is to honor African Americans central to the history of Alexandria by naming locations in the Charles Houston Recreation Center. The purpose of the public hearing is to view a presentation developed by City staff and the Charles Houston Ad Hoc Naming Committee outlining the naming process, to present the proposed names of the center's gymnasium and pool, and to receive public comment. The public hearing is the first step in the naming process.

The Ad Hoc Naming Committee proposes:

- That the gymnasium be named the "Johnson-Siebert Gymnasium" in honor of two men who served the City's African American youth. Louis R. Johnson, Parker-Gray High School coach and athletic director, produced some of the best teams and athletes in the Commonwealth of Virginia over a 20-year career. Morris R. Siebert, one of Johnson's star players, was a World War II veteran, Pentagon employee, and City Recreation employee who provided guidance and mentoring to youth in the Parker-Gray community for more than two decades.

- That the pool be named “The Memorial Pool” in honor of African American youth who drowned in the Potomac River and local creeks during segregation, when they were not permitted to use the City pool on Cameron Street because of their race.

Individuals unable to attend the public meeting may view the Ad Hoc Naming Committee’s presentation after September 30 by visiting [www.alexandriava.gov/recreation](http://www.alexandriava.gov/recreation). Written comments may be submitted to the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities, Attention: Jack Browand, 1108 Jefferson St., Alexandria, VA 22314, or e-mail [jack.browand@alexandriava.gov](mailto:jack.browand@alexandriava.gov). **The deadline to submit written comments is Tuesday, October 6.**

The City of Alexandria is committed to compliance with the City’s Human Rights Code and the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request a reasonable accommodation or to request materials in an alternative format, call Jack Browand at 703.746.5504 (TTY 703.838.4902) or e-mail [jack.browand@alexandriava.gov](mailto:jack.browand@alexandriava.gov).

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**For more information, contact Andrea J. Blackford, Communications Officer, Office of Communications, at 703.746.3959.**